Bloodfest

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by dream_k1ng

Summary

Will Graham isn't exactly an outgoing person. He prefers to stay with his dogs all day - all ten of them. But of course Jack Crawford won't let him have that. Through him and Alana Bloom, he meets Hannibal Lecter - the mysterious orphan that everyone seems to be in love with, but at a distance. And it all goes downhill from there.

_____

Highschool AU, but just as gory as the show. And of course, trans Will graham as well.

Prologue

“Run. NOW!” Hannibal snapped at Will. To hear emotion come out from Hannibal’s mouth shocked Will. Hannibal wasn’t a yeller, nor did he ever show emotion. He stood there for a minute before Hannibal waved the knife at him. “DID YOU HEAR ME? RUN!.”

Will listened to him the second time. He turned away from Hannibal and all the bruised and broken corpses on the floor of the drain. As he ran aimlessly away, he could feel the binder squeezing at his ribs. The further he ran, the harder it became to breathe. Will was wheezing; his legs burning and his head getting lighter. But he couldn’t stop. The taste of blood entered his mouth. It felt as if it were spreading all over his mouth. Whether it was the blood rained down on him a moment ago or his own was a mystery.

The moment he spotted a road in the distance, he heaved out in satisfaction. Maybe he’d actually make it. The soles of Will’s feet yelled at him in pain. The boy guessed that when he took off his shoes they would be red and raw. The moment his shoes hit the bitumen, Will slowed down to take a breath. His whole burned and he struggled to breathe. The binder restricted his ability to take big breaths, meaning he was wheezing. He already had trouble breathing, and the binder made it worse. His head felt lightheaded and his vision started to blur. But instead of panicking over his lack of breath, he slowed himself down and took in small steady ones. It helped a bit, but his body still felt like jelly.

He looked around where he was, hoping there was a car nearby. And he hoped to god that He hadn’t managed to follow him. As if on cue, a small moving light headed towards Will. He moved to the side of the road, his legs wobbling and afraid he would collapse before sticking out his hand to signal he wanted a ride. The light soon turned into a small dark blue car. It slowed down before coming to a stop near Will. The woman on the passenger seat opened her door as the driver stayed inside. She wrapped her beige coat around herself as she yelled out to Will.

“Young man, what are you out doing so late? Are you okay sweetie?” She sounded very concerned. Will didn’t blame her. It wasn’t every day you saw a teenager soaked in blood and dirt on the side of an abandoned road. Will hesitated for a second, trying to make sure his voice would sound deep enough.

“Go. Ple- We need to. He’s after me. We need to go now. Can you- please help me.” He stuttered, partially because he was out of breath and partially because he didn’t know how to explain it.

“Who’s after you? Do we need to call the police?” The woman asked him.

Will shook his head. She was taking so long. “I’ll… I’ll explain later. We need to go. Please help me.”

Realising she wouldn’t get an answer, the woman nodded and opened up the door for Will. “You look exhausted, poor thing. We’ll take you back and get to the police okay?”

As he clambered in the backseat, WIll felt lightheaded, almost as if he was about to collapse. He tried to force himself awake by blinking rapidly. The woman who had gone to talk to him closed the door as she sat down. Before she had any chance to talk to the other woman driving, Will spotted Him. He was sprinting towards the car, knife in hand. His face looked as horrifying as when will first saw it. All the flesh on his jaw had been chopped off, leaving hanging bits of flesh as blood poured down His face and neck. His clothes were doused in blood, some dried and some fresh.

“GO!” Will croaked at the two women.

The second the driver noticed Him, she hit the accelerator as hard as she could as the woman beside her yelled out in horror. Will shuffled in the backseat so he could see Him. He just stood there in the middle of the road, bloody knife in hand.

“WHEN I FIND YOU, I WILL FUCKING KILL YOU!” It was faint, but Will could hear Him say it. His heartbeat rapidly and his throat blocked up.

“Who the fuck was that?” The driver asked.

“I… I think he killed my friend.”

Chapter 1

“Come on Will,” Jack sighed. “You have to be more approachable to make friends.”

“Who said I wanted friends?” Will scowled. “My dogs are enough. I can tell you Winston is much less annoying than whoever you want me to talk to.”

Jack only rolled his eyes at Will. Will was always like this, much to Jack’s annoyance. The only people who he talked to were Jack and Alana. Even then he was more the silent type, only speaking to make snarky remakes and dry comments. Will didn’t mind the fact that he only had two friends. That meant less people go annoy him.

Jack let the subject go. Instead he slumped back down into his seat as the two waited for their first class of the day to finally start. The maths teacher was always late. As Will waited for her, he looked around the classroom. He blocked out the noise, instead focusing on the environment. The noise faded into the background of Will’s head. But that was quickly interrupted by a frantic voice greeting the class.

Slightly disappointed that the teacher arrived, Will forced his attention to the front of the classroom. He tapped his finger on the desk in a rhythmic pattern as he listened to the teacher call out the roll.

“Oli-”

“Here.” Will interrupted the teacher in a firm and deep voice. As the teacher moved on, Will could see Alana in his peripheral vision give him an empathetic smile. One more year, Will reasoned with himself. One more year and I can change my name. Though they tried to conceal it, Will could hear students laughing at him. He could hear Verger on the opposite side of the classroom saying something transphobic. Instead of giving him the reaction he wanted, Will just continued staring forward.

Much to Will’s delight, class flew by. Not that he had paid attention. But Will didn’t really care - he was ahead anyway. The moment all the students were let out, Will dashed out the classroom as if he was on fire, ducking under Verger as he tried to grab him. And of course, ignoring Jack trying to catch up to him. He wasn’t in the mood to deal with his incessant bickering. The next class was slightly more interesting. Psychology was fascinating to Will, and without Verger or his little “crew”, he enjoyed the classroom more overall.

When he slid into his usual seat at the back, someone new made their way next to him. He was a dark haired boy with a strong brow ridge and a slight pout pulled thin. His clothing was rather uptight compared to the casual attire that the other students wore. Will didn’t recognise him. He guessed he’d be new.

“Will Graham, is it?” The guy asked.

Will’s heart skipped a beat. How did he know? He had only told his close friends. Unsure how to answer, he just stared at the random guy next to him.

Realising Will wasn't going to answer him, the guy sighed softly before continuing. "I'm Hannibal. Hannibal Lecter. I'm friends with Jack Crawford."

Fighting the urge to roll his eyes, Will slumped further into his seat. "Right. He's always trying to make me get new friends. Something about socialisation being important." He snarked.

That got out a small half smile from Hannibal. The corner of his mouth raised, almost as if showing he agreed with Will. He found the way Hannibal smiled odd - like a small crack arriving from a cold statue. Thankfully for Will, Hannibal didn't attempt conversation after that short interaction. So Will just continued on with the experiment he had been studying. The one he had chosen was focused on clinical psychology - Will's favourite branch of psychology. For him it was the most interesting. He was highly empathetic, meaning he was able to really understand how others felt.

Much like the class before, psychology class went by quickly for Will. Save for the moments of suspense where he could feel Hannibal stare at him. Even though Will didn't hold eye contact with him, it still felt as though the other boy was analysing him; seeing into his soul. Will wasn't sure how to feel about it - should he be creeped out or interested in how he managed to do it?

Unlike most of his other classes, Will wasn't in a rush to leave. Instead, he let others go before him. He was halfway through shoving his belongings in his bag when he felt the presence of someone looming over him. Will looked up. It was Hannibal.

"I'm beginning to think you're obsessed with me," Will commented sarcastically, his eyebrows raised.

"Not obsessed. Simply… Interested." Hannibal responded. Just like before, his lip gave a tug to form a slight smirk

"Uh-huh." Will couldn't help but give a small laugh. He wasn't sure why, but he found this new guy charming. "And why are you 'interested' in me in particular?"

Hannibal just gave him a slight shrug. "I think we should go meet with Jack and Alana, don't you think?"

"I suppose."

And that was the last of their interaction. The two walked in silence to Will's usual area to sit - a small table at the back of a classroom. Both Jack and Alana were waiting for the two boys. When they spotted Hannibal and Will, Alana gave them a soft smile and Jack greeted them.

"So," Alana began, attempting to strike up a conversation. "How have you two been?"

"Classes were nice enough. Nothing too out of the ordinary." Hannibal replied. Will wondered if his eyebrows were permanently raised. And what his accent was.

“Will?”

“Oh. Right. Just the same. Same old, same old.” Will cleared his throat. “Jack?”

“It was Freddie’s birthday, so we had an absolutely amazing cake. Strawberries and cream. As much as she annoys me, she has taste.” He grinned.

Alana and Jack spent most of the time talking about some crime podcast they were trying to rope Hannibal and Will into listening to. It didn’t take long to convince either of them - after hearing about episodes discussing criminal psychology, they both agreed to at least try it out. As he watched both Alana and Jack ramble about it, Will grinned at their enthusiasm, occasionally giving sarcastic comments to either of them. And sometimes Hannibal joined him with sarcastic jabs of his own.

The bell to signal the end of lunch interrupted Alana when she was in the middle of explaining one of her favourite episodes, earning a sigh from her. She promised Will and Hannibal she would continue later before dashing out of the classroom. After saying a proper good-bye to Hannibal and Will, Jack followed her out.

“Well, it was nice meeting you. Will.” Hannibal gave Will a hand to shake.

Will looked at him for a solid ten seconds, switching from Hannibal’s face to the hand in front of him. “Can’t say the same.” He teased. And he left Hannibal standing there as he made his way to his next class.

Chapter 2

For the next few days, Hannibal and Will had a few conversations, but did not interact much other than that. The work they had to do for school was partly to blame. When Friday rolled around, they both arrived at their usual classroom only to find that Jack and Alana were away. Jack had gone to do more work for his chemistry class with his project partner Beverly, while Alana was home sick.

The two sat in silence for a moment, Will avoiding Hannibal's steady gaze. After a moment Hannibal looked away to take out his lunch. From what Will could tell, it was a fried rice meal of sorts mixed with vegetables and meat. Will couldn't tell - maybe beef? Will hadn't had any time to get anything to eat so he licked his lips as he watched Hannibal's meal in envy.

"Would you like some?" Hannibal asked.

"If you don't mind." Will replied.

Hannibal took the lid of the container as it managed to serve as a small bowl and spooned in almost half of what he had. Will felt a tinge of guilt from taking so much food, but he didn't say anything. It was Hannibal who'd offered after all. After pushing the lid over to Will, Hannibal handed him a spare fork. Why Hannibal had two forks, Will didn't know. Nor did he care, really.

As they are in silence, Will hummed in satisfaction. The rice was well cooked, and the vegetables steamed to a good texture. The meat was well marinated, and Will enjoyed it. But it wasn't something he recognised.

"What's the meat?" He inquired.

"Kangaroo."

Will hummed. He'd never had kangaroo meat before. He continued shoveling food in his mouth. He made sure not to be too messy as Hannibal seemed to be one for table manners.

"Shall we listen to that crime podcast that Alana recommended?" Hannibal asked.

Will shrugged. "Sure."

Hannibal fished his phone from his pocket and started to type in the name of the podcast. Will had forgotten the name of it. Once he started playing the most recent episode, Hannibal went back to eating his food. The two listened in silence as the intro music began to play.

'On today's episode of Killer Catalogues, we'll be talking more about this character in the local area. They've been dubbed "Doctor Cain". Last night, police found another body with similar injuries to those victim to Doctor Cain, states an anonymous source. Similar to previous victims of Doctor Cain, this body was found hanging on a cross, cords wrapped

around their wrists, feet and neck. However, our anonymous source states that she overheard police mentioning that there weren't any "surgical trophies" taken from the body. Could there be a second killer?'

A second person answered. 'It could very well be a second killer. However, if there are two killers, what is their relationship? Are they working together, making sure to leave plot holes to confuse police? Or are they rivals, trying to one-up each other. Or potentially this new person who is leaving the organs in is trying to catch the attention of the other killer?'

'Or it could be the same person.' The original speaker rebutted. 'Maybe they are trying to make it seem as though there are two people, so they will be less likely to be caught. There's definitely a lot of possibilities. What is Doctor Cain going to use those medical trophies for? A recent article by "Edith Walsh" theorises that the killer is not just a murderer - but a cannibal as well. What do you think about this, Marsh?'

The other hummed as she thought about her response. 'I definitely think it's possible. Rotting flesh could alert authorities if they're taking the organs with them. And if they're dumping the organs, why take them in the first place?'

As the bell rang to signal the start of their next class, Hannibal paused the podcast episode. Will handed him the lid, giving him a soft "thank you". The moment they went their separate ways, Will started thinking over what the podcast hosts had been talking about. He had heard about the local killer - or perhaps, killers - but not too much about what was happening. All he had known was that his parents would constantly ask him his whereabouts, and his curfew was now quite early.

His maths course did bore Will a bit - he understood the material well enough, so he ended up being bored during the class. Since he had sat down at the back of the classroom, he decided to search up this Edith Walsh persona. When he typed it into google, a couple of options popped up - mainly facebook and twitter pages. The fourth link however was a website. When he clicked on the link, Will found an independent journalist website. And the most recent article mentioned Doctor Cain in the title. So Will clicked on it.

Doctor Cain or His Copycat? The title read. *That is what police were wondering this Saturday as they found yet another body displayed on a cross near the local river. This time, the victim was yet another highschool student. She had disappeared on Friday. And less than 10 hours after her disappearance, hikers found her overlooking a popular area for children to play in the creek. The police have identified her as Abigail Hobbs. This has been the sixth victim in the past 18 months. All highschool students. So who's killing them? Police say that the suspect - or possibly suspects - would most likely be either a student or teacher at the local high school.*

As he scrolled down, Will took a moment to study the photos that the author had added. He took in a shaky breath. The poor girl looked pale and cold. Will couldn't help but wonder if she had suffered in her last moments. There was a lack of dried blood despite her lifeless look. WIll guessed the killer didn't want to leave any trace of DNA. This killer was definitely cold and calculated. Maybe he was teasing the police, leaving his victims in public places with no trace to who he was. The girl's head was propped upright by the rope tied around her neck. As he studied the picture, he noticed a fresh large cut that had been stitched up again.

He slashed her throat. That's what killed her. Will thought to himself. He closed his eyes as he imagined the scenario. His empathy disorder allowed him to really put himself in other's shoes. He imagined himself, late at night. Somewhere isolated. The killer must have been somewhere isolated. He imagined Abigail and the killer arguing. They were close - they knew each other. The killer's anger rose, his blood boiling as the girl screamed at him. She found something out, something she wasn't supposed to know. Will imagined himself - or rather the killer - tackled the poor girl to the ground. He had to have a large, sharp knife. Maybe a hunting one designed to cut through tough hide. And he would have slit her throat. Will saw himself drag the body to the river, downstream from where she had been displayed. That way her blood would be washed away. The lack of any DNA made Will think that she was definitely washed in something powerful.

When Will opened his eyes back up, he let out a shaky breath. For a moment, he had almost convinced himself he was the killer. That he murdered her. Will wiped his sweaty brows with a shaking hand. He needed to go outside for some fresh air. He raised his arm.

"Yes?" The teacher asked.

"May I go to the bathroom?" Will mumbled, trying to keep his voice deep. He heard someone giggle at him from the front, but he ignored them.

The teacher hummed before answering. "Fine, but make it quick."

Will wasted no time rushing out the class. His rib seared in pain from his binder as he kept walking quickly. But he didn't try to slow down. When he got to the bathroom, he checked whether there was anyone in the boy's bathroom. There wasn't. But the moment he went in, he exited. It smelt terrible, and he needed to breathe. He rushed into the girl's and locked himself into a stall.

The moment he entered, Will allowed himself to relax. He took in deep breaths, nursing his sore rib. He slumped on the lid of the toilet seat. I'm not the killer. I'm not. I was home Friday night. I don't know her. I don't know Abigail Hobbs. Will convinced himself. He squeezed his eyes shut, as if that would help his thoughts disappear. He ran his shaky hands over his face, trying to will them to stop. But it was as if he no longer had any control over them. He spent a good few minutes rocking himself back and forth on the seat, squeezing and relaxing his fists in an attempt to calm down the shaking. Eventually, he felt less panicked, so he exited the stall. When he left, he saw a redhead girl leaning on one of the sinks. Will recognised her from his maths class. He wasn't sure who she was, but he'd definitely seen her around.

"Will, is it?" She asked in a high-and-mighty tone.

"...How do you know?" Will asked.

She merely shrugged with an all-knowing smirk on her face. Will had the urge to punch her cocky expression off her face. "Oh, I have my ways. You were reading my article in class."

Will raised an eyebrow. "Your article?"

“Yes. Why do you ask?”

“I just assumed you would be older. How do you even get the information?”

“Perks of being a teenage girl. No one pays attention to you because you’re not seen as a threat.” She answered, manipulative delight in her voice.

“So why are you talking to me?” Will grumbled.

“Ah! Yes. You seemed interested. I… You see, I’m a good journalist; I can document things, I can sneak into private areas, the whole she-bang. However, I’m not really good with the more… investigating and serial killer catcher side of things. You know, guessing or investigating why murderers, well, murder. And I heard you have an empathy disorder. You’d be good at guessing a murderer’s intentions and all that jazz. I think you’d be great for the job.”

“And what makes you think I’ll do what you say? It’s none of my business.” Will rebutted.

She tried to casually shrug back, but her eyes betrayed her attempt at an innocent face. “I mean, don’t you want to stop it? The police say they’re trying their best but have you seen any arrests being made? They haven’t had even one suspect. None.”

Will interrupted her. “And what makes you think we’ll find the killer? We’re barely eighteen, and still in school. We don’t know anything about criminology or so on.”

“Ah, yes. But we do have an advantage. We have inside information. We go to the school, we know the people, we can study them. Police can only view it from the outside, they don’t really know the students and teachers.”

Will hummed as he thought about it. She did have a point. After a short pause, the girl continued on. “And hey, if you find the killer, people will respect you. Maybe those asshole transphobes will leave you alone.”

Will chuckled at that. It would definitely be beneficial if they did leave him alone. It’d make life a lot more peaceful. “Okay… I’m convinced.”

She grinned at him as she clapped her hands together. “Great! I knew you would. Oh, I forgot! Do you know who I am?”

Will nervously looked down at his feet. He didn’t. She grumbled when she realised the response was a no. “I’m Freddie. Freddie Lounds. No one knows me, I don’t really have any friends.”

As Will made his way out the bathroom, Freddie scampered after him. “I would say one of the suspects would be Hannibal.”

The moment she said that name, Will felt anger shoot through him. “What? Why?”

“He’s creepy. That guy shows no emotion. Nothing. I’m convinced he must be some sort of robot.” Freddie confessed.

“He does. Sometimes.” Will defended. But she did have a point - Hannibal wasn’t the most expressive person. On the rare occasions he let his emotions show, it was always subtle. Subtle enough that if you didn’t pay enough attention, you would miss it. But he couldn’t be a damn serial killer. Could he? Will shook his head. He didn’t know why he was defending someone he barely knew.

Freddie rolled her eyes, but made no move to continue the conversation. Will was glad, he wasn’t really one to talk too much. And definitely not to people he barely knew. When he arrived at the maths classroom, Freddie let out a gasp.

“Oh! I nearly forgot. Here’s my number.” She handed Will a slip of paper. “Text me when you can.”

Will nodded, making note to text her later as he shoved the paper into his pocket. He opened the door, letting her pass through first. He immediately went back to his seat and saved the tab of Freddie’s article. He would read the rest later.

Chapter 4

The moment Will got home, he jogged to the doorstep to greet his overly excited dogs scratching at the door. Much to his parent's displeasure, he had adopted quite a few strays. He just wanted to give them a home. So far he had taken in six of them. It was a lot of work, especially since four of them shed a shocking amount of fur. But to Will, it was worth it. They were barking loudly in his ears but since his parents wouldn't be home for a couple more hours, Will didn't bother gushing them. One of his favourite things about living in the middle of nowhere was that no one could complain about Will to his parents.

As his dogs nearly tackled him to the ground, Will slipped his bag off his shoulders and dumped it on the bench at the entrance to his house. At the bottom was a rack for all the shoes, and Will and his parents used the top as a stool. When his bag was safely balanced on the bench, Will sped his way to the kitchen to rifle around the fridge for a snack. As usual, he snapped off two squares of chocolate and immediately popped it into his mouth to avoid his dogs trying to eat it.

He then made his way back to his bag so he could take it down to his room. He placed the bag next to his bed before removing his books from it. Will sat down on his desk, shifting the lure he had been creating to the left so that he could complete the homework. All he had to do was some biology homework. The class was rather content-heavy, which meant that Will had to write down lots of notes to retain the information he had learnt. Halfway through his note-taking, Will's phone binged. Someone had texted him.

Unknown
Hello. This is Hannibal. Freddie Lounds told me you have an interest in her articles.

Will's lip curved up at the text. Of course Hannibal wanted to investigate these murders. He saved the number under Hannibal.

Will
Yeah. Has she started a little investigation group?

Hannibal
Not her. Jack. He's managed to convince Alana. I definitely find it interesting, so no complaints from me. I wanted to ask if you wanted to join us before Jack pesters you to do so.

Will snorted. Jack would be the type to do that.

Will
Sure

Will then pocketed his phone and continued to do a bit more work. By the end of the hour, he was finished. So Will decided to close up his laptop and go outside to play with the dogs. He quickly changed into some pyjamas and a hoodie before going out to greet his dogs.

“Hello!” Will proclaimed.

The dogs surrounded him like they had when he arrived home, almost knocking the boy over. He just laughed at their antics and grabbed some toys from the box that sat outside. The moment they saw the box being opened, Will’s dogs went feral. The youngest of the lot, Wintson, shoved his face into the box the moment the lid went up in order to grab his favourite toy - the fake bone.

“Hey! Patience!” Will tutted.

Winston barked at him playfully as he began chewing on the bone. Will just smiled as he pulled out more for the rest of the dogs. He threw a stick for the smallest and most energetic, running around the spacious backyard. Another benefit to living in the middle of nowhere, in Will’s opinion. In a moment, the dog sprinted back and dropped the toy for Will to throw again. He spent the next ten minutes running around with his dogs, Winston always at his heel with the bone in his mouth.

Will was about to go back to the porch to take a break from running around when his parents’ car drove down the driveway. He sighed. Will called over his dogs with a whistle. Immediately, they all stopped before running over to him. He was quick to shove them all back into the box. As he heard the car door open, Will rushed to go into the house. Winston was the first to run inside, and the other dogs followed him. Will - with some difficulty - managed to herd them to the room his parents had given him as the dogs’ home. It was upstairs, right next to his bedroom. The upstairs was smaller than the downstairs, only consisting of Will’s attic room and the one where the dogs stayed.

Will spent the next couple of hours in his room, save for when his parents called him down for dinner. He wanted to avoid them as much as he could. He couldn’t stand their transphobia. Unfortunately for Will, his parents were particularly chatty that night. Will stayed silent, trying to eat the bland food quickly so he could leave.

“I’ve heard they’re looking for new members at the girls' scouts in town. Ol-” Will’s mother began.

“No thanks,” Will interrupted.

“Why not, sweetie?” His mother put on a fake smile. She was pretending she didn’t know what she was doing. “You need some more girl friends. Who are those you’re always hanging around? Jack and what’s his name - Alana now?”

“Yes, *her* name is Alana.” Will corrected, gritting his teeth in frustration. “And I don’t need more friends. People are… complicated and annoying.”

“Come on, listen to your mother.” His father clenched his cutlery a bit harder than usual. His nose was flared, making his face look more square than usual.

“I’m not hungry.” Will sighed. He got up, avoiding his parents’ eye contact as he half walked and half ran upstairs. Eye contact was always nerve-racking for him, and the fact they were angry with him made it worse.

When he finally locked the door behind him, Will sighed as he let out a breath he had been holding since he left the dinner table. He stayed there for a few minutes, just thinking. When he heard someone whining and clawing at his door. When he opened the door, WIll found that it was Winston. As he got Winston to get into his room, Will could hear his parents washing up dinner and talking about him. They sounded angry. He could hear the poison in their voices.

He needed to leave. Whenever his parents got too angry he'd leave, and they usually calmed down when he came back. So he opened up his messages to ask Jack to pick him up. He was always willing to. Even at ungodly hours of the night. It only took a minute for Jack to respond.

Jack
Sure. On my way.

Even though he knew Jack would have said yes, Will let out a sigh of relief. He quickly changed, grabbing his binder and dressing a bit less casually as he had on home alone. He took the pair of old shoes he had in his closet for when this happened. He locked his door after making sure Winston was back in the dog's room before opening up the window. As always, he was cautious when walking down the roof. Will went the usual way to the tree leaning over the house. It didn't take him long to get down, but he missed the last branch which caused Will to slip and graze his forehead.

"Shit." He mumbled, nursing the scrape.

He ignored it, and went on his way down the driveway to where Jack usually met him. He sat down on the ground between the driveway and the road that went into town, and waited for Jack to show up.

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the late update I had a busy two weeks

For the first half of the ride, neither Jack nor Will spoke to each other. Instead, they just sat silently, the only noise being the muffled sound of the engine. Will couldn't really tell if the silence between them was comfortable or awkward. Either way, he didn't try to break it. He turned his head to gaze out the car window. The window had slightly fogged up because of the temperature difference in the car compared to the outside.

"So Will," Jack started as he turned the corner that led towards the town. "You said you'd help with the murders and shit right?"

"Yep."

"Alana seems hesitant to let you." Jack continued. "She thinks you've already got a lot on. You'll be fine right? I'm sure you can handle it."

"I think so," Will responded. He didn't want to be underestimated.

"Cool," Jack smiled at him. "Maybe we should just let the professionals do it, but… they don't seem to be getting much done."

Will snorted in agreement. For the rest of the ride, the two friends sat in silence. Will fidgeted with his fingers, slightly bored from sitting still. When Jack's house came into view, Will let out a sigh of relief. He was always nervous on the ride when running off. But for some reason when he arrived at his destination, that anxiety wore away. Like his parents' couldn't touch him - it was a safe haven. He clambered out of the passenger seat of Jack's car and slammed the door behind him. As Jack walked up the driveway and unlocked his house, Will followed him in.

"After you, Will." Jack allowed Will to walk in before him.

After he took off his shoes and placed them down next to all the other ones, Will made his way to the living room on the first right in the hallway. Alana and Hannibal were chatting on one end of the beige leather couch, while Freddie Lounds sat on the one-seater sofa on the left of the main couch. Next to her was a confident-looking girl with her arms crossed. Her smirk made it look like she knew something secret about everyone in the room - which Will had no doubt of. He recognised her as Beverly Katz. On the opposite side of the large couch sat two boys Will didn't recognise who were whispering to each other like they were best friends giggling at an inside joke.

“Will!” Alana was the first to spot before Jack had the chance to grab everyone’s attention. She stood up to greet him. On Beverly’s side were two other boys who seemed to be sharing a joke between themselves

“Will!” Alana smiled at Will once she spotted him. She waved him over. Hannibal shuffled a bit to the right to allow Will to sit down next to her. Will allowed himself to relax on the couch.

“Well now that Will is here, we can get on with it,” Beverly stated. Alana looked up to the rest of them.

“Actually let’s introduce ourselves first! I’m Alana. Alana Bloom.” She smiled and turned to Will to signal that he was next.

“Uh. Will Graham.”

They went around the sort of circle they had created. Will found out that the two secret-sharing boys were named Brian and Jimmy. Once they had gone over that and created some small talk - mainly Alana, Brian and Jimmy - Freddie clapped her hands together.

“Okay. I managed to get you all together through a mutual interest in my article.” She began. “Well, I’ve noticed a pattern. He seems to strike randomly, but recently he’s been more active. You’ve all heard of the party that Mason is holding. Do you know him? Anyway, there’s going to be so many people there, mostly drunk. If the killer is a high school student, it’s a great opportunity for him to strike.”

The others nodded in agreement. Brian piped up. “Yeah! Although doesn’t this Doctor Cain character prefer good quality organs? Ones full of alcohol may not be the best option.”

“True,” Freddie admitted as the others hummed in agreement as they thought about his point. “But it is the only big activity with distracted people. If he isn’t going to kill anyone, he might just be studying to see who to target next.”

“Whether or not he strikes, he’s highly likely to be there if your theory of him being a high school student is true,” Alana stated.

“Exactly!” Freddie’s eyes lit up in mischief once she realised Alana had agreed with her. “However, I… Mason and I don’t get along. I would not be welcome. Which is why I want you guys to go to be my little… minions, I guess I could put it.”

The others mumbled amongst themselves as they evaluated the situation. Will mainly listened. While he was cautious of Freddie, he thought it would be a good idea. The police wouldn’t be there to investigate the situation - or at least until there was a noise complaint.

“Sure. We can split up and cover more ground. Brain and Jimmy, you can go together.” Jack took the role of the leader, organising everyone. The two boys high-fived as they were grouped together. “Beverly, you can come with me and Alana. Will and Hannibal, you can go together. Freddie… stay here. It’ll be safe.” She nodded back at Jack. The others went to their partners and planned with each other what they would do if they were split up.

“When’s this party starting?” Beverly asked.

Freddie checked her watch. “In about ten minutes.”

Hannibal turned to Will. “Well, guess we will be together then?”

“That’s the plan,” Will responded. “Let’s get going, shall we?”

The group went out to the driveway to organise the ride over to the party. In Jack’s car, he, Alana and Beverly hopped in with Brian and Jimmy. Hannibal’s car was slightly down the street, so he led Will down to his car. He opened the passenger door for Will and motioned towards it.

“After you.”

Will squeezed into the passenger seat as Hannibal made his way to the driver’s seat on the other side. Hannibal was quick to start up the car and make a turn to go the right direction. Ahead of them was Jack’s car, stopped. He stuck his hand out the window and motioned for Hannibal to follow him. Jack made sure to drive slower than normal so he could make sure that Hannibal could follow him without getting lost.

“What do you think?” Hannibal asked, breaking the silence in the car.

“What do I think about what?”

“That this ‘Doctor Cain’ will be at the party. For all we know he could be anywhere. What if we missed some crucial clue of some sort?”

Will just shrugged. “Well, we don’t know. We’re taking a leap with Freddie’s idea.”

“Do you think of her the most trustworthy of people?” Hannibal asked as he signalled to turn left.

“I don’t know her that well. But I do have to admit she has a more sinister sort of feel about her.” Will admitted.

Hannibal gave him a slight smile - if he hadn’t had his full attention on Hannibal he wouldn’t have noticed it. He noticed that Hannibal had a particular smile. It was small, something well hidden. But it was genuine. A contrast to his usual stoic face. Will realised to read Hannibal, he had to look for the small details.

“Looks like we are here,” Hannibal announced as he slowed down.

Will reluctantly dragged his eyes away from Hannibal to observe the building before him. Since it had only begun minutes ago, there was a large crowd forming at the front of the house. Even with the long driveway and large front patio, people were squeezed into each other. Jack parked in between two rather large cars. The ones in his car jumped out and quickly joined the crowd.

“Should we stay back?” Hannibal suggested.

“Huh?”

“We will never find anyone in this crowd. We should wait until everyone’s settled in.”

“Sure.”

Hannibal quickly took the last empty spot so that they would be able to watch everyone entering. It took a few minutes, but the crowd eventually started to disappear. Most of them got a bit antsy, excited to get in. But other than minor shoves, no fight erupted. He could see Jack, Alana and Beverly slink into the crowd. Brian and Jimmy had disappeared into the crowd the minute they arrived, so Will didn’t know what they were up to. Once the crowd mostly disappeared, Hannibal turned to Jack, his eyebrow slightly raised in question.

“Shall we go in?”

“I guess so.” He mumbled.

Chapter 5

After being welcomed inside by some random man - Will assumed he would have to be a butler or home assistant of some kind - he and Hannibal quickly blended into the crowd. Hannibal gripped Will's wrist as to not get separated. Even though the party hadn't been going on for very long, people were already making themselves at home and not caring who they bumped into. The house - or rather, mansion - had a large empty room. Will wasn't exactly sure what it was meant to be, but he assumed that Mason had emptied it to fir the crowd. On the edges of the room were tables filled to the brim full of snacks. It ranged from strawberries and chocolate fountains to sauce-covered delicate meat selections to the finest cheeses. Those who resided on the side were busy stuffing their faces while those in the middle danced. Or tried to.

Will huffed to himself as he tugged Hannibal to follow him to a table with cheese, crackers and a selection of fruits. It would be easier to see people if he was in the middle of a crowd. To blend in, he took a few crackers and gave himself a slice of cheese. He wasn't sure what it was since the packaging had been removed. The cheese had a creamy taste and texture. Will enjoyed it.

"This is goat's cheese," Hannibal commented. "The creamy texture and tang gives it away." Will nodded to signal he had listened. He scanned the room once more before turning to Hannibal. "Do you really think we're going to find him? Here?"

"Perhaps not with such a large crowd. Too many faces." Hannibal began. "You see the door there? It's been opened. Slightly. I think we should go there. If this Doctor Cain is to murder again he would take his victim to a private place."

Will looked over to where Hannibal had pointed to. The door was across the room, furthest from the one they had entered through. Will doubted they'd have any success with so many faces, so he agreed with Hannibal. This time, he gripped Hannibal's wrist as the other led him through the crowd. They tried to keep to the edges of the room, but even then there were many who didn't pay attention to where they were.

When they finally got to the other side of the room, the two boys squeezed in to not make their escape too obvious to those in the crowd. Once they got through, Will immediately released his hand from Hannibal's. The open door had led them to a hallway. Quite a fancy one, in Will's opinion. The walls were mainly a light beige colour, with gold details on the top and bottom. Every so often a pillar appeared, bringing more depth to the walls. On the left were large dark oak doors leading to various rooms while on the right were large arched windows that let the moonlight flood into the mansion.

"I find this quite beautiful and serene." Hannibal complimented.

"I find it creepy," Will snarked. Hannibal gave a huff of laughter at his comment.

"Well, creepy or serene, we need to go through the rooms," Hannibal continued. "Or try to."

The two began at the first door in the hallway. Hannibal tugged and shoved the door, but with no luck. The second one they tried was also locked. The third was similar to its previous counterparts.

“Do you think they’re all locked?” Will asked.

“Perhaps, but we should try them all.”

Just as he said that, Will picked up on some voices. They seemed to be further away since he could only hear the echo that the grand hallway produced. He shushed Hannibal and had him listen too. When the other nodded, they quietly made their way towards the voices. At what was almost the end of the hallway, they found yet another door cracked open. As they got closer, Will could hear Mason’s voice. He could recognise it immediately. Mason always had to be at the centre of attention, and that included him talking over everyone. So his voice was easily recognised by many.

“Now, Margot, we can’t be jumping to any conclusions.”
Will could feel himself clench his jaw. Mason’s voice always had a tone of evil in his gleeful voice. He hated it. It was a slimy voice - a voice of someone who couldn’t be trusted.

“You did it, didn’t you?” Margot’s voice was lined with stress and disbelief. Will didn’t recognise her voice as she was the quieter of the two siblings. If it wasn’t for Mason calling her by name, he wouldn't have realised who it was. “You helped Hobbs with-with... You killed that girl. Abigail.“

Mason let out a cry of offence. “I did not! How dare you, Margot? Accusing your own brother of such things. You know what father would say.”

There was a pause. “Well, where were you then? That day.”

Mason’s voice lowered, so Will tried to lean over to try to see if he could still hear the two. However, his shoe betrayed him at that moment, squeaking on the shiny tiles on the floor, echoing across the hallway and into the room where Mason and Margot were arguing. He closed his eyes in horror as he heard the arguing stop and Hannibal grip his arm harder.

“Well, we’ll continue this conversation later, shall we Margot?” Will could almost hear the grin on Mason’s face. “Looks as though we have some guests.”

Will turned to Hannibal, motioning his head to the side to communicate to Hannibal whether or not they should run. Hannibal only shook his head and stood up straight. It seemed as though he had no issue being found out by Mason. Will copied his movements, though he did move a pace behind Hannibal.

The moment Mason pushed the oak door and spotted Will and Hannibal, his eyes lit up. But not in a happy, genuine way. His eyes lit up more with glee, mischief and what Will would describe as pure evil.

“Ah! Hannibal and… whatever your name is.”

“Will.”

“Will,” Mason looked him up and down slightly with disdain in his eyes. “Well, either way, welcome to the party! Are you both enjoying it?”

“It is entertaining,” Hannibal replied in his usual clipped tone.

“Well, it mustn't be entertaining enough seeing as you seem to be eavesdropping in on me and my dear sister.” He turned to look back into the room. “Margot? Are you now coming to greet our guests?”

No response. “Margot. What did I say about being rude to guests.” His voice changed, becoming more threatening than the moment before. Slowly, Margot slipped through the door. She was a contrast to her brother. Their faces had the same high cheekbones and well-defined noses, but their hair seemed to be reflections of their contrasting personalities - Mason’s wild hair that stuck up in all directions complemented his wild and mischievous personality while her hair was well kept, complimenting her more reserved nature. She gave the two boys a small smile as she wrung her hands in worry. She didn’t seem to be in a chatty mood. She stood next to her brother, but a pace behind him and held a stiff position.

“Well, for other guests it seems to be as such,” Hannibal replied.

“Ah, good to hear! Good to hear!” Mason paused. “Now what did you hear? If you heard too much, I may have to… well, you aren’t allowed to tell anyone.”

“We couldn’t really hear anything,” Will lied.

“Are you sure?” Mason questioned. “I feel like you have. But no matter! We can come to a mutual decision.”

He took a deep breath and pretended to think, tapping his chin. “How about, if you tell anyone anything you heard… I’ll have you killed. How’s that sound?”

Margot looked as if she were about to protest, but fought down her words with a thin-lipped smile.

“Considering what we heard that may not be the smartest threat,” Hannibal retorted.

Mason laughed him off, not bothered. “Blah blah blah, whatever keeps you silent.”

“Well I certainly won’t say a thing, and I’m sure Will will not either,” Hannibal assured. “Though I would warn you that Freddie Lounds may find a way to find out.”

Mason groaned. “Lounds? I should’ve known. Dammit. Did she set you up to spy on me? What does she want?”

“Not you in particular,” Will piped up. “She wants to find this Doctor Cain.”

Mason rolled his eyes. “Oh, let the police do that. Whatever. No need for all the theatrics of a high school journalist running around trying to be a hero. I mean please, what does she

expect to find?”

Hannibal let out a small sigh of impatience, not replying to Mason's short monologue. “Well, are we able to go then?”

“Sure, sure. Just close the doors behind you.” He stepped forward and clapped both Hannibal and Will on their shoulders. “And keep your mouths shut.”

Chapter 6

“Do you think he really did kill Abigail?” Hannibal asked.

“No,” Will quickly replied. “He’s definitely done something, but not that. Doctor Cain was very careful and precise with his murders; he left no DNA, and the trophies he took were surgical, according to police and Freddie’s article. That’s not Mason. He’s more messy; overconfident; he’d… he’d leave evidence behind.”

Hannibal hummed in agreement. “Though I do think he may have helped or is alongside Doctor Cain.”

“Maybe,” Will wasn’t too sure about that, though. In his mind, he’d think it more of a situation where the killer would take advantage of Mason. While the boy had an evil sort of feel about him, it was more an impulsive and childish evil. Doctor Cain on the other hand felt like he knew what he was doing; all the steps. He was above everyone else.

“Should we go?” Hannibal asked. “You do not seem to be enjoying yourself.”

“No. Too many people,” Will grumbled. “You don’t seem to be either.”

“Personally I prefer smaller occasions with a bit less-”

A random girl fell onto Hannibal after being pushed out of the crowd. She had let go of her red cup of alcohol - Will assumed it to be beer from the distinct smell it had - and all over Hannibal’s front, staining his white shirt and blazer.

Hannibal took in a breath of irritation. “A bit less of a reckless and rude crowd.”

The girl didn’t even bother apologising, only going back to her friends as if nothing had happened. “I think I’d prefer dealing with Freddie than this,” Will snorted.

“I need to go home to change,” Hannibal mentioned. “We should go tell the others in case they think we ended up the next victims.”

At first, they tried to find the others to tell them they would be leaving. But they could find either group, and so after about a half hour, the two boys gave up. Instead, Will sent Jack and Alana a text. Hannibal had insisted they should leave quickly so he’d be able to take off his sticky shirt. The moment they got out the door, Will took in a deep breath. On the front yard were a couple of people passing around a blunt, and a few vomiting out their dinner from the amount of alcohol they had had. From the corner of his eye, Will could see Hannibal looking at the drunkards with a vaguely judgemental face. His eyebrows were slightly raised, and his mouth opened in shock.

Will made his way to Hannibal’s car quickly, the other boy following close behind. This time he got in before Hannibal could open the door for him. Hannibal didn’t waste too much time getting back. His house was a while away from Mason’s. Like Will, he was out of town, but

on the opposite side. The trees were more scarce around his house, but the opposite side stood the south of the woods. The house itself was more impressive than Will's - the inside was grandiose, while the outside was more plain. It wasn't to the level of the Verger house, but it still had its charms.

"Would you like a drink?" Hannibal asked as the two removed their shoes at the front.

"Uh, sure."

Hannibal led Will through the front room of the house and into the dining room. He waved a hand at the table, inviting Will to sit down. "Make yourself at home."

The dining room was quite different to what Will was used to. Most people's dining rooms featured bright walls in order to make it feel more homely. Hannibal's walls were a dark navy. On one side there was a fireplace. The dark walls with the fireplace made the room seem warmer, and oddly comforting. He took a seat next to the head of the table. He ghosted his fingers on the glossy checkered wooden table, admiring how smooth it was. The room smelt like musky burning wood with a hint of sweetness wafting from the general area of the kitchen.

Will opened his phone to check that Jack knew where he was. Once he saw Jack's name on his screen, he nodded to himself and pocketed the phone.

"Will, your drink," Hannibal handed him a glass.

"Thank you," Will grabbed the glass of water and took a sip. It was cold, refreshing him.

They sat there for a minute in silence, occasionally going for a sip of water. Hannibal then broke said silence. "Actually Will, would you like some wine?"

"You have some? Are we allowed to?" Will asked.

"I do have some - my parents have developed a habit of collecting wines. And I assure you my parents have no issue with it." He stood up and traveled past the kitchen.

"Give me a moment Will!"

It didn't take him long. By the time Will have finished analysing everything in the dining room, Hannibal arrived with a bottle of wine in his hand. He showed it to Will in a similar style as one he had seen butlers do in old movies.

"Care for a Syrah?" Hannibal gave him that small smile again.
"Sure," Will reciprocated his smile. "I haven't tried it, but I'm sure it's good."

"You have not tried a Syrah? Well, good thing I am here to expand your palate." Hannibal joked. "It is produced from the Rhône valley, located in the south of France. This bottle was aged six years I believe."

Despite the fact he had no clue about anything Hannibal had just told him, Will nodded as if that was something he understood. Hannibal went back into the kitchen to grab the two of

them some glasses for the wine. When he came back out, he handed Will his glass. The wide-bottomed glass was only filled halfway. He took a sip. The wine had a bold flavour with a blackberry undertone. There was something else about the flavour that had a distinct memory but Will couldn't quite place his finger on it.

"Quite nice," Will complimented.

Silence settled down over the two quickly after. Will sat there, occasionally sipping at his wine. He tried to think about a conversation topic - Hannibal seemed like a nice enough person and he wanted to make an effort in trying to befriend him.

"So, are your parents not here?" He asked.

"No," Hannibal responded. "They are currently overseas for work."

"Ah. What do they do?"

"They run a company."

"What for?" Will asked as he took another sip.

"...Business."

When Will had finished his wine, he checked the time. It was well past midnight, which meant that his parents would either be asleep or waiting for him at the front porch. He hoped they would be asleep as when the morning came, they would pretend that nothing happened the day prior and they would leave him alone. He took a sigh and closed his eyes. He did that when he was stressed or worried - for some reason if he couldn't see the world, it didn't exist. Will didn't want to go home, but he knew he had to. He carefully placed down the wine glass on the table.

"Have you finished?" Hannibal asked softly.

Will only nodded. He felt a bit light-headed from the alcohol. As Hannibal took back his glass, Will could only stare at the fireplace opposite to him. For some reason it felt as though the fireplace was shrinking and swelling before his eyes. The more Will stared at it, the more it shrunk and expanded. Will rocked his body with it, going back when the fireplace expanded and closer as it shrunk. It started making him sea-sick, so Will closed his eyes again. This time it wasn't a soft squeeze of escape, and more hard as if it would rid him of his drunkenness.

"Will?"

"Uh, yeah?" Will snapped his eyes open and looked over to Hannibal.

"Are you ready to go?"

Chapter 7

"Will?"

Will blinked rapidly as he realised his name was being called. He could feel himself starting to panic. Ever since that moment where the fireplace had started to warp, it kept on getting worse and worse. Shakily, he rubbed his face. It was like a grounding tool for him.

"Ye- Yeah, I'm… I'm…" Will licked his lips as he struggled to talk. "I'm all g-good."

"Are you really that nervous to see your parents?" Hannibal kept his eyes on the road.

"No… No," He was, but he didn't think it was the cause of his panic.

Will felt himself heat up. Despite the fact that the car was quite cold, he was starting to sweat. He rubbed his forehead, feeling his damp hairline. He kept blinking rapidly and squeezing his eyes shut as if it would help his uneasiness.

"If you feel that bad, we can go back." Hannibal suggested. "What do you say?"

Will nodded rapidly. He didn't think he'd be able to sneak past his parents in this state. So Hannibal obliged, taking a U turn through a no-through road back to his house. Will just sat next to him silently. When they finally got back to Hannibal's house, he jogged over to Will's door to open it for him. As he helped Will out of the car, he noticed that Will was hesitant.

"Will, are you okay? Can you hear me?"

He didn't respond, instead scowling at Hannibal. He decided not to push it, instead leading Will through the front door. Will could hear his own breath shake as he watched the door move. All of a sudden, he could feel his stomach drop and his heart freeze. He grabbed onto Hannibal's shoulder, but felt something off about him. When he turned around, he panicked.

The other boy's eyes were gone. Instead, they were replaced by worms. They were eating his flesh. Will forced down a scream. Hannibal's flesh was rotting. Will took a shaky step back as the corpse reached out a hand to him. Will just backed up further.

"***Will,***" Hannibal's rotting corpse sounded like it hadn't spoken in a long time. Worms peaked out his open mouth.

"G-get away from me," Will yelled out shakily to the corpse. He looked around him. If he managed to slip past, he'd be able to run into the woods. For now, the rotting corpse didn't seem to be moving. The worms crawled out his eye sockets and started eating the flesh on his face.

"***Will, come with me.***" Worms went flying out the corpse's mouth as he commanded Will. A couple landed on his arm. Will screamed and dusted them off.

Instead of listening, Will shot off in an attempt to escape. The ground felt unstable, but Will kept running. He almost threw up at the state of Hannibal's corpse. The rotting flesh smelled putrid, clogging up Will's smell; the flesh was green and purple. Whether that was from bruises or rotting, Will couldn't tell. He managed to get past the road and to the edge of the forest. Will risked a look behind him. Hannibal's corpse was following him into the forest, a trail of worms behind him. So Will kept running.

The further he got into the woods, the less he could feel his legs. At first they burned from the strain of running on the unsteady ground and tripping over roots WIll hadn't noticed, but afterwards they lost sensation. Will was just running. He had no clue where he was going. At first he thought he had gone in the direction towards town, but he still hadn't reached it. He slowed down, finally taking shelter behind a particularly large fallen tree trunk. He gripped one of the branches as he caught his breath. His ribs seared in pain.

Even after a while sitting down, his heart rate hadn't dropped. Will looked at his hands. They were covered in sweat. If he hadn't known better, he would have thought he'd been in a pool a moment before. He tried drying his hands on his pants. He could only do so much as his hands couldn't stop shaking. Trying to calm himself, Will rocked himself back and forth. It usually worked on him. He squeezed his eyes shut so he wouldn't see the moving world. It was giving him motion sickness.

That's when he felt a coldness on his bare ankle. Will snapped his eyes open, only to be greeted by a rotting hand attached to a corpse that looked like Abigail's corpse. He screamed, immediately standing up and trying to shake off her hand. The worms that had been crawling on her hand made their way to Will's leg. He brushed them off aggressively. Even though the image horrified him, Will couldn't rip his eyes off Abigail.

"***Will,***" Her voice was the same as Hannibal's had been - hoarse, and felt as if something cold and slimy had been poured down the back of his shirt.
"Please, please…" Will started sobbing. He tried to run once more, but his legs were stuck. It was like he was a statue. Scared but unable to move, Will could only shake as the corpse crawled up to him. Her nails were bitten down the nail bed, with some of the worms ripping them up. The dried blood on the top of her fingernails flaked off onto the rocks and leaves on the ground.

Will watched the corpse stand, worms falling off her as she did. Similar to Hannibal, she was purple and green. But she had a greyer tinge to her - as if she had been rotting longer than Hannibal had been. There were small holes in her face where worms had eaten at her face. And not just her face - there were bloodied craters all over her body, infested with worms. While Hannibal's eyes had been filled with worms, hers had blood running down them.

Before he could do anything else, Will felt a hand grab him. When he turned around, he was face-to-face with Hannibal's corpse again. How Hannibal managed to catch up with him, Will didn't know. He tried to rip himself out of Hannibal's grip, but did not succeed. He kept on trying again and again, even trying to pry Hannibal's fingers open. He ignored the worms crawling up his body, even as they started chewing at his flesh.

"***Will,***" Hannibal croaked. "***Calm down.***"

Will couldn’t respond, his throat dry. In a last, desperate attempt, he punched the corpse’s face. While Hannibal didn't flinch, his grip loosened. So Will took that opportunity and slipped out of his grip before shooting off. The heaviness from moments before had disappeared. However since he was exhausted, Will was slower. As he ran, he could hear the leaves crunching underneath Hannibal’s footsteps.

As Will got tackled to the ground, he got the air knocked out of him, causing him to gasp out. Hannibal had pinned him to the ground. Will wiggled over so he was face side up to try and push him off. As he struggled, worms from Hannibal's eye socket dropped onto his face. He periodically shook them off as he felt them try to eat their way through his flesh.

“LET GO OF ME!” He screamed as he finally found his voice.

But instead of letting him go, Hannibal only brought a hand to his mouth. Will’s vision started blurring and dark spots appeared at the edge of his vision. The less air he got, the less he struggled. His legs and arms became weaker, unable to get up. And then he passed out on the forest floor, worms enveloping his body.

Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

Sorry that it's shorter than normal!

“Will?”

The boy sat up with a start as he heard Hannibal’s voice. He stifled a scream of terror as he realised that Hannibal was no longer a rotting corpse, but rather a very much alive teenage boy in a suit way too fancy for someone his age.

“You have been unconscious for the past couple of hours,” Hannibal informed him. “I was starting to get worried.”

“Wha-what happened?” Will pinched the bridge of his nose. Despite the fact it seemed like he’d been asleep for the past couple of hours, he was exhausted.

“Not sure… You seemed panicked. You ran into the forest, tripped, and fell on your head. I tried to wake you up but I did not succeed, so I brought you here again.”

“I…” Will licked his dry lips. “I don’t remember much.”

That was a lie. In fact, Will remembered it all in vivid detail. But he always struggled to describe things, so he opted to just keep it to himself. Plus, if he did say anything, Hannibal would most likely tell his parents, which would result in two options: Will getting in trouble for drinking alcohol, and if he didn’t, they would send him to some psychiatrist. Will hated people trying to analyse him, so he wanted to avoid that as best as he could.

“Are you able to walk?” Hannibal asked. “And would you like a drink of water?”

“Yeah.”

Hannibal nodded before walking off. As Will attempted to stand up, his head spinning, Hannibal came back with a glass of water. Grateful, Will drank it. It soothed his throat. It was cold and tasted sharp - probably mineral water.

“The others were concerned after we did not meet up back with them, but I assured them that you were well in my care. I told them that you fell asleep.”

Will nodded thankfully at the boy. He didn’t need either Jack or Alana knowing about his… whatever that happened. They would surely freak out. Whilst he was grateful to have caring friends, they sometimes went a bit overboard. Especially Alana - she often treated him as a glass vase and as if life was a destructive cat waiting to knock him over.

“What’s the time?” Will asked.

“Four o’clock in the morning,” Hannibal replied. “Do not worry - I had a nap; I feel well rested.”

“I didn’t think you even slept.” Will mumbled sarcastically. Hannibal’s lips twitched up in amusement.

“Do you know if the others are awake?”

“I heavily doubt it. Most of them didn’t come home until an hour ago.” Hannibal told Will. “We can try in a few hours maybe.”

Will nodded slowly so as to not hurt his head too much. “What do we do then?”

Hannibal shrugged in response. “Whatever you wish. Would you like to go back home?”

“Yeah,”

So after having an apple to settle Will’s grumbling stomach, they slid into the car and made their way to the other side of town to Will’s house. After Hannibal dropped him off, Will climbed back up the tree and into his bedroom, careful not to make too much noise so that his parents wouldn’t wake up. As soon as he was sure he couldn’t hear them stomping up to his room, he undressed. Taking off his binder was the biggest relief - he’d gone so long with it on. Instead, he got into his pyjamas and a hoodie to seem as though he’d been there for a while. Will jumped into bed, hoping to grab a couple more hours of sleep.

As much as he tried, Will couldn’t go to sleep. So instead he went over to his desk and opened up his laptop. The first thing he opened was TattleCrime.com - Freddie’s website. There was an update. At the top was an article titled *Teenage Party Disaster*. Will let out a shaky breath - that would definitely be hinting that someone was murdered at Verger’s party the night prior. He clicked on it.

When high school students attended the party held by Mason and Margot Verger at their parent’s house, they did not expect to be witnesses to a murder. It happened near midnight. A couple of students - who wish to remain anonymous - had had a bit too much alcohol that they had decided to go investigate the house. After all, the Vergers are known for their extravagant decorations and architectural tastes. But what they didn’t expect was a dead body floating around in one of the fish tanks.

The students - after uncovering the body - claimed they immediately called the police. Other students reportedly did not enjoy this invitation, most of them scattering and running off in all directions. Police suspect the killer could have been in that crowd that managed to slip away. So far, police say that they have no leads to the killer of the victim, who has been identified as Marissa Schurr. She had been the friend of Abigail Hobbs, another victim that had been discovered only a week prior at the local river.

“How did she get this information so fast?” Will mumbled to himself.

The only lead that police have found is that the killer is sure to be a high school student since the only ones present were students attending the local high school. Local police have said that they will implement more security around the high school in hopes to catch the killer.

Will snorted. What would they be able to do? No one had been killed on school grounds. And surely this killer wasn't stupid enough to leave any evidence on school grounds. He thought about it more. After finishing the article, he realised that this killer hadn't taken any surgical trophies - similar to Abigail Hobbs. However this time, she was the only one who wasn't displayed on a cross. Will found that quite odd - this Doctor Cain and his potential copycat - always stuck to that imagery. So why change now?

Will took out his phone as he got redressed and jumped out of his window again. Hopefully someone would pick up, because he had some important information to share.

Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

i'm so sorry this is so late I've been struggling a lot with writers block :')

“What?” Jack rubbed his eyes sleepily.

Will let out a groan of frustration as the three before him blinked at him, blank.

“What do you mean, her murder was unintentional? Doctor Cain is precise and planned. Surely he’s not going to make any mistakes.” Alana argued. Freddie nodded in agreement.

“No! No, not him. His copycat.”

“You really think he has a copycat?” Jack asked.

“Yes. Doctor Cain is known for taking surgical trophies. Whatever he’s using them for, he takes them. In a very precise and surgical manner. Someone who knows his way around organs.” Will explained. “But there’s been a few that have strayed from this in the form of leaving the organs as is. Why, all of a sudden, change from this iconic cross presentation to just floating around a fish tank? As I was saying, her death was a mistake.”

Freddie scribbled down some notes in a leather-bound book, nodding encouragingly for Will to continue.

“Marissa Schurr and Abigail Hobbs were best friends. They were always together. I think Marissa had either seen or knew who killed her best friend. And when her killer found out, he freaked and dumped her into that fish tank. It was sloppy - anyone could have seen him. It was obviously rushed and not a part of his plan. But he managed to get away with it. Why? Because he knows the place. He knew where to go. And on top of that Hannibal and I overheard Mason and Margot Verger talking. Margot accused her brother of the murder. But… I don’t think he killed Abigail. No. At first, I shot down any thought of him being involved but I’m starting to think he was an accomplice of the copy-cat. It’s not a copy-cat – it’s copy-cats.”

“Are you sure? You can’t just randomly accuse someone and expect people to listen.” Jack pointed out. “And if we go around and accuse him immediately if there really is another copy-cat, then he’ll get nervous and stop. We won’t find him.”

“Yes, I know. I know. We need more evidence. I just want to connect all the dots. Maybe it’ll make more sense.” Will reassured Jack. “I have an idea who might be the second copy-cat – the whole ‘brains’ of their little scheme.”

“Who?” Everyone else asked.

“Garret Jacob Hobbs. Mason’s best friend. The only one in their little possé with half a brain. Plus, he’d know the Verger Mansion like the back of his hand.”

“Makes sense.” Alana mumbled as she took a sip of water. “Let’s keep an eye on the both of them.”

“I could sneak us into the crime scene.” Freddie suggested, piping up for the first time since the conversation had started. “Maybe we can find something to help us, or to confirm to at least ourselves that Will is right.”

“And how would we do that?” Alana side-eyed her.

Freddie smirked at her in response. “Oh, I have my ways.”

“Huh. That was easy.” Will mumbled as he stepped over some broken glass from the tank. According to the chatty police officer who was supposed to keep civilians out of the crime scene, the teenagers had smashed the glass of the tank in an attempt to “save” Marissa Schurr. Not that it would have done anything since she had already been dead for a while once they found her. The floor had a small layer of water on it - as one would expect after a tank full of glass - but not as much as Will would have expected for such a large tank.

He looked around as Freddie stared at him. But no matter how much he tried to concentrate or think, all he could feel was her piercing gaze on his side.

“Do you mind?”

“Sorry,” Freddie looked to the ground, away from Will.

Taking a deep breath, Will tried to imagine the scenario. He thought that he would be able to get away with a murder. But there was an outlier – someone had seen or knew what he had done.

He was back at the river, hovering over Abigail’s body. Will could smell the drying blood on his hands. Or rather gloves. He couldn’t tell how he felt about it – on one side, it made him want to retch. On the other, it was a strangely satisfying smell. As he was dragging Abigail’s body to tie her up to the cross. He was fine – he was fine. He was okay; not caught. He thought no one saw him. No, if someone did, they would have been killed and displayed next to Abigail. No, the problem was the party.

He was wondering the halls of the mansion, running his hands over the patterns on the walls. That’s when Marissa Schurr appeared. She wanted to confront him.

“You fucking killed her.” She accused. “Your own cousin!”

“Excuse me?” Will snarled back at her. But his heart jumped. It was him.

“You killed my best friend. Abigail Hobbs. I saw you. Admit it.”

Will looked left, then right. There was no one else. “What are you on about? I didn’t do shit. Plus, what evidence do you have?”

She stared at him, her eyes full of rage.

“Fine!” Will admitted. “I did! I killed her! It was fun.”

Marissa snorted in response. “Well…”

She seemed to be thinking. But that’s when Will noticed that her grabbing something from behind. He struck out, pinning her to the floor. A knife and her phone clattered out from her back pants pocket. He held her down as he reached for them. The phone was open on a recording app.

“Oh, you were recording me.” Will growled. He deleted it, then went to the deleted section to permanently get rid of it. Then he smashed it to the ground, shattering the screen.

“HEY!” Marissa yelled out.

“Oh, you won’t be needing that.” Will smirked. “In fact, you won’t be needing to use anything.”

Will took his hands and pressed them roughly against her throat, cutting off her airway. He got a few bruises form the kicking and punching and scratching, but he finally managed to knock her out. He then dragged her to the bedroom and got some rope. Some he had been hiding. He bound her tightly so if she woke up, she wouldn’t be able to get up quick enough to get oxygen. He put on a lot so it would be heavier. He then left and carried her to the fish tank. Going up a flight of stairs with her limp was difficult, but he managed it. And he rolled her into the water. To his delight, her clothes and the rope weighed her down, dragging her down. And she didn’t look like she was about to wake up anytime soon.

Will let out a small gasp as he opened his eyes again. “I was right. Garret Jacob Hobbs killed Abigail. And Marissa.”

“We still need solid evidence.” Freddie argued. “Plus, what makes you so sure?”

“I can’t explain it… I just know.”

“So… what do we do? How do we prove Hobbs is the copy-cat? Or well, one of them.”

“We wait.”

Chapter 10

He was back at Hannibal's house. Strangely enough, Will found Hannibal's house more comforting than his own despite the eerie emptiness. Maybe it was because his parents weren't there. And that Hannibal seemed to actually care about him without being overbearing like Alana.

When he had hallucinated the other day, Hannibal had helped him. But he didn't freak out. Will liked that. Hannibal could keep his head on straight in stressful situations. It almost unnerved him how emotionless the guy could be. But it wasn't enough to make him think about it more than just a fleeting thought.

"What are you thinking about?" Hannibal asked, lifting his head up from the meat he was chopping up. He did it in a very precise and practiced manner – it almost put Will in a trance.

He closed his book, deciding he'd finished with his homework. He just couldn't concentrate. "Nothing. Just…"

"Garret Jacob Hobbs and Mason Verger? Are they on your mind?"

"Yeah," Will sighed. "And also no. We still don't know who the real Doctor Cain is. With the other two it was easy! I… I could imagine myself as them, I could see them kill the victims. But Cain… he's more elusive. He's above everyone; he's all-knowing somehow."

"You think he sees himself as a god?" Hannibal inquired. He threw the rice into the pan along with the vegetables. "God is all knowing. A powerful being. What is Doctor Cain's motive? Perhaps he enjoys control and power. And so does God. So he appoints himself that role."

"Maybe," Will pondered.

"Do you see yourself as a god?"

"What?"

"Do you see this investigation as a toy you play with. It's something you can control. In contrast of this chaotic and cruel world?" Hannibal stirred the pan.

"No. It's less like a toy and more of a burden. Something I can't escape. I'm not enjoying it." Will argued. "Like a chore or a job."

"Do you think God loves every bit of his duty?" Hannibal countered. "He has His burdens Himself, no?"

Will smiled and shook his head. He was not used to highly philosophical conversations. Hannibal seemed to get what he was trying to communicate and continued cooking. Will watched as Hannibal seared the meat and mixed in the spices and sauces. It filled the kitchen with a beautiful aroma. It was a strong scent – one that made Will's mouth almost water.

Once he had finished, Hannibal turned off the stove and went to grab two plates for him and Will. He scooped up the fried rice and meat onto the plates. He was quite generous with his serving sizes. He pushed one plate towards Will, and handed him some utensils. Will pushed his homework off to the side so he could concentrate on the meal. It was nice. Hannibal had cooked it in a way that made the meat soft and tender with a crispy exterior to contrast the crispiness of the vegetables. The egg was only partway mixed, making some interesting combination of flavours with the yolk and egg white. The rice had been slightly burnt on the bottom to add some crispiness to the softer white rice.

"This is so good," Will groaned as he shovelled the food into his mouth.

Hannibal smiled at him. "I'm glad you appreciate my cooking."

For the most part, the two boys sat there in silence. They were too busy eating and thinking to hold a conversation. But they didn't really need to. Somehow, Will felt comfortable in the silence. Usually, he'd feel awkward. There was always a social expectation for him to maintain a conversation, which was not his strongest suit. But there was no expectation of small talk.

When he'd finished, Will cleaned up his plate and thanked Hannibal. As Hannibal cleaned up, he wondered around the house. It was quite large. Too large for a teenage boy who basically lived by himself. He made his way into what looked like an office. Or living room. A bit of both, it seemed. Perhaps this was where Hannibal's father resided when he was around. It had a high ceiling to make way for the second story of bookshelf. On the wall opposite was a deep red accent wall. Paintings hung there, with a bookshelf tucked into the corner. Above it was a continuous bookcase with no gap left. It covered two walls. Hannibal was a fan of reading, it seemed. In the middle of the room sat some couches and a desk. Because of the size of the room, the desk and couches seemed tiny. The two couches faced each other.

Will slowly walked across the room, skimming the spines of the books on the lower bookshelf, and admiring the sketches on the desk. He assumed it was Hannibal's. For some reason, the drawings had his energy. Will just knew. As to not be too invasive of Hannibal's art, Will moved onto climbing the ladder to investigate what books he had at the top. As he skimmed through, Will realised they were mainly philosophical books. He wasn't surprised by the way Hannibal talked. Some were collections of Leonardo da Vinci's engineering marvels and his anatomical studies. Some were on analysing the sculptures and paintings of old masters from varying time periods and eras. There was a lot of queer literature as well. Song of Achilles. Will could remember that book. He had quite enjoyed it. Next to the queer literature was Greek Mythology. Next, old Christian books. Ones analysing God, religion, and why humans craved something to believe in. Then human evolution. Quite a selection of books. Will was impressed.

He picked up a book. It was one about old Catholic art during the renaissance era through southern western Europe. There was a bookmark. Will opened it. It was a piece made by Giovanni Donato da Montorfano called Crucifixion. As the title of the painting mentioned, it depicted three men being crucified. Will wasn't too knowledgeable on Catholicism, but he assumed the man in the middle was Jesus. Four smaller figures dressed in bright clothes

surrounded him, praying. On the ground of the painting a woman was depicted hugging the crucifix which Jesus had been nailed to. The crowd looked to be a mix of innocent civilians and soldiers. The ones who mourned his death and those who caused it. Will closed the book.

“Do you enjoy my collection?”

Will nearly jumped. He hadn’t noticed Hannibal walk in.

“Yeah,” Will said as he put the book back. “You really enjoy philosophy.”

“I do quite enjoy discussions surrounding philosophical topics, yes.” Hannibal walked up to Will, staying on the lower level. “Would you like some books to borrow? I’m sure you will find it quite interesting.”

“Yeah, sure.”

“I shall see what I can find you. Any preferences, Will?

chapter 11

The dogs were getting a bit too energetic to stay indoors, so Will ushered them outside for a walk. That, and he wanted to avoid getting yelled at for keeping loud strays by his parents. He led the dogs towards the open land about a while form his house so their barks wouldn't travel to the irritated ears of his parents. Will jogged alongside three of his dogs – Winston being on of them of course – while the other three ran back and forth, sniffing whatever they could find. One ran up to him with a stick in her mouth. Will took it from her jaws, swinging his arm back and throwing it as far as he could.

"Come on," He cooed. "Go fetch!"

At that moment, all six dogs went into a frenzy, chasing after it. Will laughed. Winston had caught it, so he ran back with the others chasing him for it. Will threw it again. This time, Lily caught it. She was the youngest, and probably the most energetic. Will kept throwing the stick, letting the dogs get worn out from all the running. He chased them, making sure to shower each with a lot of attention. He sat down, surrounded by dogs, patting them as much as he could. Some preferred head scratches, some preferred belly rubs, some didn't care. Will knew exactly who liked what.

After two hours of running and fetching, all the dongs seemed to calm down. Will decided to lay back into the grass, staring at the canopy above. His dogs laid down around him. Winston had his head on Will's stomach, so the boy let his hand rest on Winston's head. It was comforting.

The sun was starting to set, creating a nice sun-kissed effect on the leaves and branches of the creaking trees. The breeze lightly swayed the branches. It was almost like the trees were dancing. A floating leaf caught Will's eyes. It was alone and small, fluttering in the wind. Spinning, like it was the second dancer in the performance the trees were putting on. It started getting lower and lower, towards Will. Eventually, it landed on Winston's nose. He huffed it off, and the leaf landed on the ground. Will shifted Winston's head to his lap so he could sit and pick up the leaf. It was mainly a dark orange, but a splash of green was holding on at the bottom. He crushed into his hand. When it didn't create a crunching sound under his hand, Will threw it to the side in disappointment.

"Well, we should get back, shouldn't we?"

A few barked at him, almost as if they were responding. Will took it as a yes. So he rounded them up, guiding them back to the house. This time, since the dogs had worn themselves out, it was a much slower travel. By the time they got back, the sun was almost gone. Will made sure their paws were relatively clean before he ushered them inside. He didn't want to give his parents an excuse to yell at him. As he ushered the dogs up the stairs, Will glanced behind him. His parents were drinking. Again. He wondered what kind of mood they'd be in after. Drinking could either make his parents extremely angry or extremely nice. Always one or the other. Will just hoped it was the latter.

“You!” A booming voice interrupted Will as he was about to go up. It seemed like his parents were not happy.

“What are you doing?” It was his dad.

“Going to my room.” Will explained. Will relaxed his hand, removing it from the railing. His hand was sweaty. He rubbed it on his pants.

“Bullshit,” His mother interrupted. She extended a dinger towards her son. It was crooked, so really she was pointing slightly to Will’s left. “You’re always sneaking off to your little friends, doing God knows what.”

“I swear, I’m just going to my room.”

“Don’t speak like that to your mother, young lady!” His father growled.

There was a moment of silence, where all three of them stood, waiting for the next thing to happen. A sniffle. Will’s mother was making her eyes water. It was something she did to get her way. She would paint herself the victim so that her knight in shining armour – Will’s father – could come save her.

“What are you doing when you sneak off?” His mother asked, nodding thankfully at her husband.

“Stuff.”

“Stuff?” Will’s mother scowled. Her tears seemed to have dried up quickly as she took on an angry face. “Who are you with? I don’t want you around that Alana boy. Whatever his real name is. I don’t want him influencing you.”

“She’s perfectly fine,” Will grit his teeth. “Believe it or not, I’m able to think for myself.”

“You are such an ungrateful little shit!” Will’s mother stood up but stumbled. She made her way towards Will, her fist up. “We did everything for you! We sacrificed our lives for you! We fed you, gave you a house over your head, everything. Why are you so ungrateful?”

“Yeah, that’s what parents are supposed to do.” Will fought the urge to roll his eyes.

“Are you calling me a bad mother?” His mother’s eyes started watering. There is was, Will thought. She was now the victim. She had managed to switch from angry and intimidating to a soft, vulnerable woman who needed to be saved. To make everyone feel bad for her. Because who would be mean to a mother “trying her best”?

“See how you upset your mother?” His father snarled at him. “She’s right you know. And now after sending you to that shit-hole of a school you turn into… this. You were a nice young girl. You did what you were told. Look at you now.”

He shook his head, rubbing his hand up and down his wife’s back. The silence fell again, only interrupted by the hiccups and sighs of Will’s mother. Will couldn’t tell if his father

knew that his wife was only faking it. Maybe he was on the bandwagon and played the role of a protective husband.

Will gritted his teeth in distaste. His parents couldn't seem to deal with the fact that he was no longer a naïve kid who couldn't form his own thoughts. That, or they only had him to live through him. He always needed to be perfect. But he wasn't. Will sighed. "Can I go?"

"Yes," His father scowled. "You've done enough."

As he nearly reached the top, Will heard his father call out to him. "And don't you dare run off like you usually do. If you do, we're kicking you out. If you don't want to stay here, you don't deserve our hospitality."

Will stopped for a second. Were his parents being serious? It was hard to tell since they were drunk. They were a bit unpredictable with alcohol in their systems. "What?"

"You heard me! Now go to your room. I want to see an apology letter to your mother."

Will jogged up to his room. He didn't want to stay at his house with how angry and aggressive his parents were, but what if they were being serious? Where would he stay? Alana's house? Jack's? What about the dogs? What would his parents do to them? There were six of them, there was no way they'd be able to stay at Alana's or Jack's house. He couldn't risk them being put down or shoved into a shelter. Then a thought struck into his head.

Hannibal.

Chapter 12

“Are you sure you are okay, Will?” Hannibal asked, a hand on Will’s shoulder.

“I’ll be fine,” Will assured him. “They’ll probably forget soon anyway.”

The two had just arrived back at Hannibal’s house. Contrary to his parents’ wishes, he had left the house. Will just couldn’t find it in himself to care. The duffel bag full of his stuff lay on the ground next to his feet, sagging. Hannibal had agreed to letting the dogs stay as long as they didn’t enter the house. He wasn’t a fan of dog hair being everywhere. Despite the fact that he was inside a rather large house, Will could almost hear his dogs whining in the backyard.

“Can I interest you in a drink? Coffee perhaps, or some wine?”

“Coffee,” Will replied. “Thank you.”

Hannibal nodded, leading Will from the front of the house to the kitchen. The kitchen was nicely made. The dark cupboards and cabinets contrasted nicely with the walls, giving the room some depth. The tabletop of one of the counters shone under the light above. Most of them were tucked to the sides, but this one stood proudly in the middle. It looked smooth, so Will ran his hands over it. The texture was nice – smooth, solid, yet it did not squeak or cause friction on his hand.

“Stainless steel,” Hannibal gestured to the tabletop that Will had been admiring. “It’s easy to clean.”

Will watched Hannibal as he turned on a coffee machine. It looked rather complicated. He watched Hannibal open up a container, press the ground beans tightly into a small container that he locked into the machine. Underneath some spouts from where the coffee would come from, Hannibal put a white coffee cup on the grate. He seemed to know what he was doing.

“My parents got this last year,” Hannibal explained. “They were here a few weeks, but they left yesterday. You just missed them. I would have wanted to introduce you, but I was uncertain as to whether you would want to.”

“Oh, well. You’ll have to introduce me next time.”

Hannibal smiled. “Would you like some milk with that?”

“Uh, yeah. Sure.”

Hannibal went over to the fridge, grabbing a bottle of milk. Inside his fridge, Will spotted quite a few bags of meat vacuumed into plastic bags.

“Wow, you like your meat.” He commented.

“I guess you could say that. A lot of my recipes require protein. I am planning on making a sous-vide dish. Sous vide duck leg with celeriac choucroute, bulgur wheat and cherries.”

“Sounds delicious.” Will complimented. Hannibal thanked him before turning back to the milk.

He poured some milk into a steel container and placed it underneath an extended steel stick sort of contraption on the side of the coffee machine. When he turned it on, it let out a squeaky noise, but Hannibal quickly muffled it with the milk. He turned the container around as the milk started frothing. Will peered over Hannibal’s shoulder in interest.

When he was done, Hannibal cleaned up the steam wand with a cloth. He poured half the milk into the coffee cup before scooping in some froth and using the rest of the milk to create a leaf design. He handed the cup to Will.

That coffee had been the best Will had ever had. While yes, he hadn’t had many in his lifetime (he just didn’t see the need for one every day), he’d never had any as good as the one Hannibal had handed him a moment ago. The initial taste was rustic, flooding his tastebuds in a warm taste. It wasn’t just the temperature that was warm. Usually, coffee had an aftertaste of bitterness, but this aftertaste was more subtle. The milk helped subdue the bitterness, but there wasn’t too much to the point where it tasted like just milk.

“Thank you,” Will said as he put down the cup. Hannibal picked it up and went to the sink to wash it.

“I hate to push anything, but I felt as though you are not as ‘okay’ as you insist.” Hannibal mentioned as he rinsed the cup.

Will fiddled with his fingers as he looked down. He took a breath. “I… I’m as fine as I can be.”

“Would you like to talk about your parents?” Hannibal asked.

“Ah, yeah. Them.” Will mumbled.

“Do you resent them?”
“Resent? Uh– Maybe? I mean I had an okay childhood. It wasn’t anything special. They had their moments.” Will shook his head. He thought he’d promised himself to keep others out of his head. His business. Why was he telling Hannibal this? He shut his mouth.

“I find it difficult to believe that. Why are they suddenly changing? They do not seem to be the most pleasant of people from what I have heard. I believe you must have some parental issues. You are independent and keep to yourself most of the time. Did you receive any love from them?”

Will laughed, almost scoffing. “What?”

Hannibal wiped his hands on a towel once he’d placed the cup into the dish washer. He looked to Will, his eyes dead serious, mouth set as always. A stray hair fell into his eyes.

“Wh- Are you trying to psychoanalyse me or some shit?”

“No,” Hannibal denied. “I simply believe that if I help you realise your relationship with your parents can help improve your self-confidence. Or whatever else you struggle with.”

When Will stared at him, not speaking, Hannibal went on. “My relationship with my parents is not the best either. They never abused me, but I spent most of my childhood ignored. I believe I can relate to you, to an extent.”

That explains the fact his parents are never home, Will thought. He watched Hannibal as he walked away from the dishwasher and back to Will. Will spoke up when Hannibal was halfway to him. “Well, if you really want to know, they’re drunks. They’re bearable when sober, but drunk? That’s a different story.”

“And you have no caution with alcohol?” Hannibal asked. “I remember that you did not hesitate to drink the wine I gave you last time you were here. Two months ago, I believe. Most children with alcoholic parental figures tend to be cautious around alcohol.”

“Well, I’m not.” Will shrugged, pursing his lips.

“Good, you are strong.” Hannibal nodded.

“Thanks, I guess?” Will half scoffed and half laughed. He should have been annoyed at Hannibal trying to analyse him. But for some reason, whilst he felt a bit of initial frustration, he felt no resentment against Hannibal for doing that. It was strange.

The two of them stared into each other’s eyes for what felt like hours, but realistically was only a couple minutes. Hannibal’s eyes were mid-tone brown, with what seemed like some green flecks on the edges. His stare was intense. Like he knew something Will did not. The direct light from above cast a shadow over Hannibal’s eyes and lips. Will’s eyes flicked from his eyes to his dead set lips.

It was Hannibal who broke the silence. “Would you like to help with dinner, Will?”

Chapter 13

Will watched Hannibal as he was chopping up the liver for their dinner. He was in charge of the side dish of cucumber and yogurt. It was simple, something he couldn't mess up. Hannibal seemed to be quite the perfectionist when it came to his dishes. When he had finished with the tzatziki, Will pushed it to the side and came up to the Hannibal's right.

"Have you come to watch me cook?" Hannibal asked softly.

"Yeah," Will admitted. "It's interesting."

"Let me give you a show," Hannibal smiled.

Hannibal grabbed a bottle of something–Will wasn't exactly sure what it was–and poured it into the pan. The pan set on fire, bursting up and engulfing the food. Will yelped, stepping back. He could feel the heat against his face and neck. As quickly as it had risen, the flames died down.

"It's a cooking procedure called Flambé," Hannibal explained. "Where you pour alcohol into a hot pan to create flames."

Will nodded, still a bit on edge after having a large flame erupt near his face. He took a step behind Hannibal just in case. When he finished cooking the duck, he took out some plates–plain white, save for a spade pattern on the edge. He placed the flambé duck in the middle, with the roasted carrots, parsley roots, and celery on one side and the tzatziki on the other.

Hannibal ushered Will into the dining room, placing the plates on the dark oak table. He pulled out a seat for Will, motioning towards it. Nodding in thanks, Will took the seat and picked up his fork to eat. He waited until Hannibal sat down to start.

Will started with the vegetables, enjoying the varying tastes of the carrot and parsley. He didn't often have parsley, but despite its odd texture, he found it enjoyable enough. The tzatziki gave a good balance to the rest of the meal, cooling down Will's mouth from the heat of the rest. The duck had absorbed some sort of marinade, creating an amazing taste that almost melted in Will's mouth.

"I give my compliments to the chef," He smiled, swallowing the duck he had been chewing

Hannibal smiled. "Thank you. I take great pride in my cooking."

"Do you cook a lot?" Will asked.

"Yes," Hannibal dipped his duck into the tzatziki. "I find myself using food as an art form. Most see food as a just fuel, but I believe that it should be an art form too. Something to savour. Something to enjoy with those you love."

Will raised his brows. "Huh. That's nice."

“What about you Will?” Hannibal asked. “What do you enjoy doing?”

“Fishing. It’s calm. I have an excuse to be alone. I hate being with people, honestly. They always expect me to make eye contact, I have to talk, and that’s just not me.”

“Well, you are talking to me now,” Hannibal pointed.

Will snorted, smiling. “You’re an exception, I guess.”

Again, a genuine smile slipped through the cracks of Hannibal’s face. “I am an exception? Why is that?”

“You’re different. Unlike other people, you never ask for an explanation, you’re always calm. You don’t freak out on me.” Will explained.

Hannibal scraped up the last of his meal before pushing the plate to the side. He stared over to Will. “Well, I am afraid you have become too interesting to me. I would like to get to know you better. Why all the dogs?”

Will shrugged. “I guess I saw myself in them. Most of them were strays. Not wanted anymore. Pitied. Like me, I guess. My parents pretended to like me for a while, hoping I would be the perfect child. A little toy for them to play with. But I didn’t turn out right, so they just… dropped me. I’m now a burden. I never really had too many friends, but I didn’t mind. Those dogs became my friends because they genuinely love me.”

“I can understand you, Will,” Hannibal said. “I never really had friends either. I was reserved. But we have each other. We are both abandoned, not loved. We can love each other.”

Will blinked, taken aback. “What?”

What Hannibal had meant by that, Will wasn’t sure. Did he love Hannibal? He couldn’t deny that he found Hannibal attractive. His deep-set brows, high cheekbones, and well-groomed hair, along with his strangely fancy outfit, definitely attracted Will. They were opposites, yet the same. Will, who viewed himself as more scruff, often running around with dogs and fishing, whilst Hannibal was more high-strung, finding entertainment in the kitchen. But they shared many opinions, including their distaste for large crowds and being abandoned.

“Oh,” Will flushed. “Yeah, I guess we do have each other.”

Silence.

“Let me clean up dinner,” Hannibal offered, breaking it.

Will handed him his plate, following Hannibal back into the kitchen. As Will was cleaning his plate, he couldn’t help but let his mind wander, thinking about what Hannibal had meant.

“Will?”

He shook his head as he realised Hannibal was calling to him. When he turned, he nearly gasped at how close Hannibal was. Will’s throat tightened, unable to speak. Hannibal placed

a hand on Will's cheek, his deep hazel eyes burning into Will's. Under the bright light, they looked almost orange. For some reason, he couldn't rip his eyes off of Hannibal's — they were too beautiful.

"May I kiss you, Will?" He asked.

Will licked his lips, looking at Hannibal's own lips before looking back into his eyes. "Yeah. Yeah."

Will placed his hands on Hannibal's upper chest as their lips connected. It was soft. Just as he expected, Hannibal's lips were perfect, not too dry. Almost too perfect. Almost as if he wasn't even human. Will pushed back onto Hannibal, deepening their kiss. When they parted, they stared at each other for a moment before crashing their lips together again. Throughout his life, Will had read and heard people raving about how kissing someone for the first time was amazing—electrical; causing their heart to roar. He never really understood that until that moment. His heart felt as if someone had reached into his ribcage and squeezed his heart, and his lips felt like they'd been zapped. But oddly enough, in a good way.

Slowly, his hands moved to wrap around Hannibal's hips, pulling him in. Their kissing escalated, both of them pushing into the other's lips. It was like an ocean storm, seas dancing with the crashing thunder. When they parted for some air, Will and Hannibal smiled at each other, panting, their foreheads pressed together.

"I never thought that you would have been so passionate," Hannibal whispered. "I read you to be hesitant in romantic situations. But you are unpredictable."

Will chuckled. "Honestly, I thought the same. I surprised myself."

A minute of silence passed before Will spoke again. "So, what does that mean? Why did you kiss me?"

"I believe you to be interesting. I liked you. Unpredictable, quiet. Always analysing. I found you attractive, despite the poor-quality cologne and dog hair." Hannibal explained.

"Poor quality cologne?" Will feigned offence. "Excuse me mister expert, but I think it's quite nice."

Hannibal's lip twitched. "I'll have to introduce you to a nicer one, Will."

"Will you accept my affection towards you, Will?" Hannibal asked as he took Will's hand from his hips into his own, interlocking their fingers.
"Are you asking me if we can be boyfriends?" Will raised a brow.

"Yes."

"Then yes," Will smiled. He kissed Hannibal's cheek.

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